

This is politics at its worst, played over war. And that is no way to honor the service and sacrifices of our troops and their families or to find a better way forward in Iraq.

Like many in this Chamber, I have traveled to Iraq and to Afghanistan. I have met there and here with tough, smart, patriotic men and women who fill me with tremendous pride. They have been performing magnificently under difficult conditions. They have paid a heavy price since the war began in 2003.

Last week we had a moment of silence to mark the day that the number of American servicemembers killed in Iraq reached 2,500. And more than 18,000 others have been wounded. As of June 17, New York has lost 116 soldiers. The combined number of New York soldiers killed and wounded is 1,038.

I have spent time with wounded soldiers and Marines. I spent time on Saturday with grieving families, mourning lost loved ones. I have tried to answer the questions they ask. I have shared the grief they feel. Those who have not lost a loved one or seen him or her return injured still are anxious every day while a parent or a child or a spouse serves far from home. Not a day goes by that I do not pray for the safe return of every man and woman now stationed in dangerous places around the world—not a single day.

This is not a time for partisanship. It is past time for this administration to level with the American people, for this Congress to find its voice and fulfill its constitutional duties to check and balance the executive branch, and for the Iraqis to chart a clear and responsible path to stability and peace.

I call on our colleagues on the other side of the aisle to fairly and honestly consider the Levin amendment as an alternative to the status quo, when we know that the status quo has not, is not, and will not create the conditions needed for the Iraqis to achieve the stability and security they seek and for us to bring home our troops.

The conflict in Iraq has now gone on longer than U.S. fighting in the Korean war before the armistice. We ought not to attack one another for asking the tough questions and presenting alternatives about how to achieve success, limit the loss and sacrifice of our young men and women.

As we debate our next steps in Iraq, it is critical that we recognize and fix, as best we can, the mistakes that have already been made and not repeat them. The Bush administration misused the authority granted to it, choosing to act without allowing the inspectors to finish the job in order to rush to war, without a plan for securing the country, without an understanding of the insurgency or the true human, financial, and strategic cost of this war, all the while viewing the dangerous and unstable conditions in Iraq through rose-colored glasses and the prism of electoral politics here at home.

It is time to put policy ahead of politics and success ahead of the status quo. It is time for a new strategy to produce what we need, a stable Iraq Government that takes over for its own people so our troops can finish their job.

That is what the Levin amendment does. It calls for a comprehensive roadmap to achieve peace and stability. It also sets into motion the steps that should be taken for Iraq to move itself forward and become more capable of defending its territory, ending the sectarian violence, and purging the insurgency.

The Levin amendment does put us on a responsible path by calling for stronger nonmilitary actions, such as a conference of neighboring nations, greater rebuilding efforts, and better internal political reconciliation, by requiring the Iraqis to disarm road militias and take over more of their own security.

The only way the new Iraqi Government can gain credibility is by proving they can handle an increasing share of the security of the country with fewer, not more, U.S. troops.

It is clear in the Levin amendment that we recognize the President's role as Commander in Chief. It is the President who will make these decisions. What the amendment attempts to do is to provide a different roadmap, to set some conditions in contrast to the unconditional, open-ended commitment that we have had for the last 3 years and 3 months.

In yesterday's Washington Post, one expert laid out such a roadmap which described the importance of reducing our military presence in Iraq so as to enhance the legitimacy of the Iraqi Government in the eyes of both Iraqis and Iraq's neighbors. That expert was Iraq's own national security adviser.

I commend the entire article to be read because as the national security adviser sets forth a roadmap for the way out of Iraq, he makes very clear that the removal of foreign troops will legitimize Iraq's government in the eyes of its people. That is not an American. That is not a Democrat. That is an Iraqi in this new government who recognizes what some, apparently, in this Chamber refuse to, which is, yes, we need conditions. The current policy has no conditions. It is unconditional.

The Levin amendment sets forth conditions, sets forth the kind of steps and benchmarks that we as Americans in positions of responsibility have every right to expect that the Iraqis will step up and meet. Clearly, that is also the position of the new Iraqi Government. In fact, one can read this statement and find much in the Levin amendment that supports the position put forth by the Iraqi national security adviser.

No war since Vietnam has stirred the emotion to the extent of our people as this one. I hear it all the time as I travel from one end of New York to the other. People stop and ask if there will be an end to the loss of American lives.

They wonder what the goal is; how do we define success? The rhetoric on the other side is all about symbols and slogans, but how do we define success?

They believe that we in Congress should not be wasting this country's time with partisan political slogans while we have troops in the field. They grieve over the mistakes that have been committed by an administration that failed at every turn to see the difficulties ahead of it or the benefits of using all the nonmilitary means available to it.

Of course, there are always unexpected events in war that can change the best plan or put some detours into the roadmap. The Levin amendment takes that into account. But I believe we must end the current open-ended, unconditional policy and focus on clear goals on all fronts and to make that absolutely clear to the Iraqi Government.

If we do that, we can begin to bring our troops home this year. That is why I fervently believe members of both parties should support this resolution.

How much time do I have left, Mr. President?

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator has used 15½ minutes.

Mrs. CLINTON. I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas is recognized.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I want to start my remarks this afternoon by recognizing the ultimate sacrifice paid by one of our soldiers, one of my fellow Texans, who gave his life this week in Iraq.

PFC Kristian Menchaca, age 23, of Houston, joined the military last year and was soon deployed to Iraq as part of the 1st Battalion, 502nd Infantry, 2nd Brigade, of the 101st Airborne based in Fort Campbell, KY.

According to military reports, Menchaca and his fellow soldier, PFC Thomas Tucker of Oregon, were part of a unit checking vehicles near the Euphrates River south of Baghdad. They were taken when their checkpoint was attacked and, as we now know, they died in service to their Nation, and their bodies have since been recovered.

Private First Class Menchaca is described by his family in various reports as a man who loved basketball and Mexican food. His cousin, Sylvia Grice, is quoted as saying:

He talked about how happy he was that he was serving his country. Everyone he met liked him. He had that kind of personality. He liked to help people. He was just the kind of person that you enjoyed being with.

Private First Class Menchaca was married in September of last year, and he often talked of joining the Border Patrol when he finished his military service.

Mr. President, I know I speak for a grateful Nation when I say I am thankful for the service of good men and women like Private First Class Menchaca who serve our country day in and day out and who place themselves in harm's way in the service of